

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori of Japan May 5, 2000

The President. Good morning.

Visit of Prime Minister Mori

Q. What are you going to talk about?

The President. Well, we're going to talk about our relationship, which is very, very important to both of us. I'm delighted to have Prime Minister Mori here and anxious to have this chance to visit, and I'm also very much looking forward to going to Okinawa to the G-8 meeting this year. So we have a lot to visit about.

Q. Is this your first meeting?

The President. Yes. It's our first official meeting, yes. We met briefly once before.

Q. Mr. President, do you intend to talk about trade and especially the telecommunication dispute?

The President. We're going to talk about everything, I hope—everything we have time to talk about.

Q. What's your view of the Japanese economy?

The President. I think it's getting better, and we're going to talk about what the future is. We support a strong Japanese economy. I think there are a lot of inherent strengths in the economy, most of all in the people and the level of skill and education and capacity to grow. I believe that they will return to big growth, I hope sooner rather than later.

Q. Mr. President, what's your message to the people of Okinawa?

National Economy

Q. Mr. President, the American economy, is it overheating?

The President. Well, the inflation report yesterday was quite good. And as you know, this morning the unemployment report is wonderful news for the American people, the lowest in over 30 years now. So I'm hopeful, because combined with yesterday's inflation report, the news is good, and we just have to keep on a steady course, keep working.

Okinawa

Q. Mr. President, what's your message to the people of Okinawa when you go there in July? Are you willing to talk with them and explain to them why we need to maintain all those U.S. bases in Okinawa?

The President. I hope I'll have a chance to speak with them, and I want to talk to the Prime Minister about how we should do that. But we tried to be sensitive to the concerns of the people and to be highly respectful. And where mistakes have been made, we've tried to correct them, and we will continue to do that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:57 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on the Employment Report and an Exchange With Reporters May 5, 2000

The President. Good afternoon. In a few moments I will depart for a meeting with the Senate Democrats in Pennsylvania, where we will discuss ways to keep our economy strong and our Nation moving in the right direction.

Before I leave, I'd like to share the latest good news about our economy. This morning, we received the news that we have achieved 3.9 percent unemployment. That is the lowest

peacetime unemployment since 1957. That was the year the Dodgers last played ball in Brooklyn.

Most Americans have never lived in a peacetime economy with unemployment as low as it is today—indeed, its lowest rate overall in over 30 years. Over the last 7 years, our Nation has created 21 million new jobs, cut the unemployment rate almost in half.

I just want to make the point again that this is clear evidence that our economic strategy works, fiscal discipline, more investment in education, technology and training, the expansion of markets for American products and services. It's given us the lowest unemployment rate for African-Americans and Hispanics ever recorded, the lowest unemployment rate for women in more than 40 years, strong wage growth among all income groups.

The American people deserve the lion's share of the credit for this historic achievement. But we have a responsibility to stay on the path that got us here, the path of fiscal discipline, debt reduction, expanded trade and increased investments in our future. I hope we will do that. This is a happy day for the people of the United States. Thank you.

National Rifle Association

Q. Mr. President, what did you think of the video done by the NRA some time ago?

The President. The NRA video? I haven't seen it. I thought you were great in mine.

Q. Put that in writing. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President, we don't know if your—

The President. No, I really haven't seen it. I'll be glad to comment on it once I see it or know what's in it. But I haven't seen it.

Q. You haven't read about it?

The President. I heard about it, but I haven't—the one where they're—oh, do you mean the film where they say they're going to have an office in the White House? Did they make that video, or was it just video by someone else? I thought they were trying to keep that a secret until after the election.

What I think about it—I don't know that they think that Mr. LaPierre will literally have an office here if President Bush—Governor Bush gets elected President. But I do believe that it's clear, from the record of Governor Bush in Texas and from the statements and from the increased visibility of the role of the NRA in the Republican National Committee, that whatever is done on this issue will only be done with their approval. They will have unprecedented influence here if the American people should decide that that's what they want.

But you know, that's what you have elections for. You can—I can believe that without thinking anything bad about Mr. LaPierre or about Governor Bush. I think they may just really agree that we shouldn't close the gun show loop-

hole or ban the importation of large-scale ammunition clips.

Q. Do you think it's going to be a—

The President. Let me just say—let me remind you, the previous Republican administration was not for the Brady bill, and they weren't for the legislation banning cop-killer bullets. That's just the way they think.

But I think one of the reasons I'm glad the Million Mom March is occurring is that it at least raises the possibility that Americans who disagree, who believe that we can have commonsense gun safety measures to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children, without having something that they believe is destructive gun control, those people may vote on these issues this year.

But the American people need to understand, this is one of the four or five big choices before them, and they'll just have to decide, and that all the NRA did was to commit the truth. I mean, they told the truth, and what they said was right.

"I Love You" Computer Virus

Q. Mr. President, I don't know if your office has been affected or infected in any way, but what does this "I love you" computer virus say about the world, our society, et cetera, and how maybe even one person can affect it and create chaos?

The President. Well, it says that—first of all, we've been very fortunate; the Government has fared well here. But it says that we've got a lot more work to do to protect all these systems in the private sector, and the Government has to keep working, too. It says that as we become more interconnected, in an open way, that we become—as we reap the benefits of greater interconnectivity, we become more vulnerable to the disruptive forces that would seek to—either for bad design or just to provoke chaos—to take advantage of it, and we just have to keep working on this. But I'm very gratified that the fundamental governmental systems seemed to have been unaffected here, and we just have to keep working on it.

Usama bin Ladin

Q. Mr. President, the State Department, the other day, issued an international report on terrorism. And also, this was the last of your administration, sir, and as Usama bin Ladin is still

at large, so what do you have to say about international terrorism and all the——

The President. You mean about bin Ladin still being at large? Well, we're doing our part to change it. And I hope we'll be successful.

Interest Rates

Q. Mr. President, on the economy, are you afraid the Fed's going to raise the rate in response to the numbers?

The President. Well, I think that these numbers have to be seen in terms of yesterday's numbers. Yesterday's inflation figures were quite encouraging, and I think they show that—core inflation at something like 2.4 percent, and I think the overall inflation rate will come back toward that, now that the oil prices are moderating. So I think that should be quite encouraging, not just to the Fed but to all Americans and to American business—that basically the productivity of the work force, continuing to be fueled by information technology, has en-

abled us to have an amazing amount of growth and low unemployment, at quite modest levels of inflation. And so that's encouraging to me, and I think the facts speak for themselves on that.

Thank you.

Vieques Island, Puerto Rico

Q. What did you think of the Vieques operation?

The President. Well, it went pretty well, I think. They did a good job.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:12 p.m. on the South Grounds at the White House, prior to his departure for Farmington, PA. In his remarks, he referred to Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association; and Usama bin Ladin, who allegedly sponsored the 1998 bombing attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

Statement on the Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Report May 5, 2000

Today we have further proof of the continued strength of our economy. With the announcement of 3.9 percent unemployment, we have broken the 4 percent barrier for the first time in three decades. Over the last 7 years, our Nation has created 21 million new jobs and cut the unemployment rate nearly in half. This is more than a symbolic milestone in the longest and strongest economic expansion in history. It shows that our strategy of fiscal discipline is working for all Americans. We have the lowest unemployment for African-Americans and His-

panics on record, the lowest unemployment for women in more than 40 years, and strong wage growth among all income groups.

The American people deserve credit for this historic achievement. And they have made it clear that we should stay on the path of fiscal discipline, debt reduction, and targeted investments in our people. We should not adopt risky tax cuts that would derail our hard won prosperity. We have a responsibility to maintain the fiscal discipline that got us here.

Statement on the Northern Ireland Peace Process May 5, 2000

I am greatly encouraged that Prime Ministers Blair and Ahern have announced that their intensive talks in Belfast over the past 2 days have made progress, providing a sound basis for restoring the political institutions and achiev-

ing full implementation of the Good Friday accord. I urge the parties and paramilitary organizations to seize this opportunity to realize these goals in order to secure lasting peace for the